

Catch Shares Task Force Status Report, July 2, 2009

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This is the first of a series of regular reports on the status of the NOAA Catch Shares Task Force. We officially got underway with the notification of the final participants on Monday June 22nd and a [NOAA press release](#) issued the next day. The group is comprised of a mix of NOAA leadership and eight Regional Fishery Management Council members with expertise and experience with catch shares. The task force will contribute ideas to facilitate the consideration and implementation of catch share programs in those fisheries where they will provide the greatest benefit.

During June, NOAA members of the task force went to seven Council meetings to initiate a dialogue on the impediments the Councils face in considering catch shares. The Councils were interested and willing to work with us but pointed out that resources are currently stretched thin in the Councils and NMFS regions in preparation for implementation of Annual Catch Limits mandated by the Magnuson-Stevens Act. We plan to continue these discussions with each Council and are also working directly with the Council Coordinating Committee to establish a long term commitment to work together on catch share issues.

The majority of the Task Force work will be done electronically as members span six time zones and we only have until August 1st to complete our tasks. We did set up three teleconferences to help conduct our work; the first one was held on Tuesday. The conversation was a positive exchange of information and ideas about the consideration and implementation of catch share programs. The discussion affirmed that catch shares are not a panacea for all fisheries. In appropriate fisheries, however, they can be a key tool in achieving sustainable fisheries and ensuring ecosystem health and resilience. A number of participants suggested avoiding mandates targeting numerical or percentage goals for the use of catch shares, and to focus on providing improved capacity, support and resources in fisheries that will result in the greatest benefits from catch shares.

Last week two trigger questions were posed to the Task Force. They both dealt with the first objective which is to create a NOAA Policy that ensures catch shares are fully considered when Councils take up fishery management plan amendments. The first trigger question asked each participant to list the three most important catch shares policy questions they thought NOAA should be addressing, and how and why those issues are impeding the Council's/Secretary's consideration or use of catch shares. The range of responses included issues of catch share eligibility and allocation; program funding and cost recovery; stakeholder buy-in; catch shares impacts on communities and states; and applicability criteria to determine when catch shares should be considered.

To help stimulate discussion and focus on what might best be included in a NOAA policy, a second trigger question identified 20 criticisms or deficiencies of catch shares as identified by individuals or groups who oppose catch shares. The Task Force participants were asked for their views on which issues were appropriate to address directly in a NOAA policy statement on catch shares. Both questions are generating some good discussion and we expect to continue to use this approach to solicit views and opinions from the Task Force members.

On Wednesday I briefed Dr. Lubchenco on our progress, and we agreed NOAA should be helping to identify the characteristics of those fisheries that would benefit most from the consideration of catch shares. On the task force operations, it was agreed that it would be beneficial to obtain broad input and invite the public to comment on any draft policy statement submitted to Dr. Lubchenco by the task force. The task force findings and drafts to Dr. Lubchenco are due August 1st. During this abbreviated time frame, the Task Force will continue to look for opportunities to gather useful input.

There is a lot of work to accomplish in the next 30 days before our August 1st deadline, but I'm optimistic that we can accomplish our tasks if we stay organized and use our time efficiently. We have a good group assembled, and I look forward to working with them.